

Trump sees immigrants as invaders. White-nationalist terrorists do, too.

The president's language sends dangerous signals.

By [Arsalan Iftikhar](#)

The massacre of at least 50 Muslims at two New Zealand mosques during Friday prayers is just the latest high-profile white-nationalist terrorist attack. From the January 2017 mass murder of six Canadian Muslims at a Quebec City mosque to the mass murder of 11 Jewish congregants at Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, there was one theme that tied together all of the terrorists in these cases: The suspected gunmen in all these attacks saw immigrants as invaders of their countries.

President Trump expressed his condolences Friday over the New Zealand attacks, and he called the slayings “a horrible, horrible thing.” But Trump also used language that made clear that he sees immigrants as a threat to the United States: “People hate the word ‘invasion,’ but that’s what it is,” [he said](#). The White House says it’s “outrageous” to connect the president to the New Zealand massacre. But when Trump’s rhetoric — about Central American migrants and about Muslims — is so ugly, it’s clear he’s not capable of discouraging radical racists who see his hostility toward immigrants as a welcome sign for their own xenophobia.

Trump has a long history of lies about Muslims. “I think Islam hates us,” he [famously told](#) CNN’s Anderson Cooper in March 2016, before he ever entered the White House. He has insisted on telling a complete fabrication, that [thousands of American Muslims](#) in New Jersey were cheering the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on television (such a thing never happened). “I watched in Jersey City, New Jersey, where thousands and thousands of [Muslim] people were cheering as that building was coming down. Thousands of people were cheering,” he said at a campaign rally in Alabama in 2015, in what PolitiFact [rated](#) a “[pants on fire](#)” lie. Trump also picked up and enthusiastically pushed the “[birther](#)” lie that Barack Obama was a Kenyan-born Muslim, which many white supremacists still believe.

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His ban on travel by people from seven [countries](#), five with Muslim majorities, started out as a proposal to ban any Muslims from entering the United States, and he revised it to the [version that became law](#) only after courts ruled that his language about Muslims showed the ban was improper.

For many Americans, Trump's casual attitude toward the normalization of white nationalism was never more evident than during the 2017 Charlottesville protests, when he infamously [blamed](#) "both sides" for the bloody mayhem during the rallies — mayhem that resulted in the brutal mowing down of 32-year-old Heather Heyer by [an avowed neo-Nazi](#), who also wounded dozens of others when he rammed his car into a crowd of counterprotesters. Trump shrugged off the problem again Friday, saying that white nationalism involves only "a small group of people that have very, very serious problems" and that it's not a growing problem.

Trump, obviously, did not pull the trigger in any of these recent acts of white-nationalist terrorism. But his lackadaisical response to them has been all the worse because many of the accused perpetrators say they find his rhetoric and success in U.S. politics inspiring.

The 28-year-old Australian who New Zealand authorities say brazenly live-streamed his mass murder on Friday [published a manifesto](#) praising Trump as well as Anders Behring Breivik, the Norwegian white supremacist who murdered 77 people in Norway in 2011 because of his hatred of Muslims and multiculturalism. Like Trump, the alleged New Zealand shooter referred to immigrants as "invaders." He said he admired Trump "as a symbol of renewed white identity and common purpose," though "dear god no," not as "a policymaker and leader."

Just two years ago, another terrorist executed six Muslim worshipers [in a Quebec City mosque](#) during morning prayers. That shooter posed for a selfie wearing a red "Make America Great Again" cap and [searched for Trump](#) a total of 819 times on Twitter, Google, YouTube and Facebook before his act of Islamophobic terrorism. (Trump had just recently taken office, but he'd been campaigning on his ugly vision of immigration for a year and a half by then.)

The same horror — a mass killing in a sacred place, inspired by hatred and fear of immigrants — has happened in the United States, as well as outside, of course. Tree of Life synagogue was devastated by an act of anti-Semitic terrorism when a white supremacist executed 11 Jewish congregants last fall. The man charged in that shooting said Trump wasn't doing enough to stop immigration. But he blamed Jews for Muslim migration to America. "Open your Eyes!" he [posted on social media](#). "It's the filthy EVIL jews Bringing the Filthy EVIL Muslims into the Country!!"

As a Muslim human rights lawyer, I don't share Trump's lack of concern about white nationalism. I will always believe that an attack on one house of worship anywhere should be considered an attack on all houses of worship everywhere. With the devilish rise of white-supremacist terrorism worldwide, we need to stand up for one another as allies and hope that God will forgive us for what we have done to each other.

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